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ABSTRACT

This document provides materials concerning the evaluation of Minnesota's Early Childhood Family Education Programs. Part I summarizes the findings and conclusions of evaluations conducted since the first six pilot programs began in 1975. Part II deals with the characteristics of successful, high quality programs and includes an instrument designed to assist school districts in self-evaluation of their programs. Criteria for assessing the quality of program components are delineated in the areas of community outreach and input, parent education, child centered activities, and program operation. Part III describes the rapid growth of the program. Accomplishments and concerns are noted in regard to the extent of participation, program administration, assistance to districts, advisory council representation and functions, interdistrict cooperation, facilities, and scheduling. Part IV suggests a plan for the collection of information needed to monitor and evaluate programs for program development and long-term evaluation purposes. A long-term evaluation strategy developed by Irving Lazar is described in the final section of the report. (RH)

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DIVISION OF DEVELOPMENT AND PARTNERSHIP

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EVALUATION STUDY OF EARLY CHILDHOOD FAMILY EDUCATION

Report to the Legislature
March 1, 1986

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Evaluation of Early Childhood Family Education has been a concern and a priority since the first six pilot programs began in 1975. Part I summarizes the findings and conclusions of the variety of evaluations conducted since that time. Most of these evaluations were summative or formative in nature and produced findings which have assisted significantly in the subsequent development of the program.

Part II deals with the characteristics of successful quality programs and includes an instrument designed to assist school districts in self evaluation of their programs. Quality criteria are delineated for community outreach and input, the parent education component, child centered activities and program operation.

The rapid growth of the program since 1983 when the program began to move from grant-funding with administration by the Council on Quality Education to state aid/local levy formula-funding and administration by Community Education is described in Part III. Accomplishments and concerns are noted in regard to the extent of participation, program administration and assistance to districts, advisory council representation and functions, interdistrict cooperation, facilities and scheduling. Enhanced outreach, extensive coordination with other community resources and scheduling to accommodate more families are among the noteworthy accomplishments. If current rates of participation continue throughout the year, the program will either meet or exceed participation figures projected in the 1985 biennial budget.

Part IV suggests a plan for the collection of information needed to monitor and evaluate programs, both for program development and for long-term evaluation purposes.

A long-term evaluation strategy developed by Irving Lazar of Cornell University is described in the final section of the report. Because Minnesota is the first state to attempt to evaluate the long-term effects of this specific program with such an extensive and broad participant population base, there are no tried-and-true instruments available to accomplish this task. Consequently, Lazar identifies the essential tasks and suggests a possible strategy for beginning this effort.

A ten-minute videotape has been prepared to accompany this study report. It enables the viewer to quickly "visit" several programs, and get a picture of what parents and children are actually doing as they participate in the program. Several parents offer their personal evaluation of Early Childhood Family Education. Excerpts from an interview with Irving Lazar summarize the benefits of the program and plans for future evaluation of the quality and cost-effectiveness of the program.

Copies of the 1/2" VHS videotape may be borrowed from the Legislative Reference Library (612/296-3398) or Early Childhood Family Education, Community Education Section, Minnesota Department of Education (612/296-8311).

A SUMMARY OF PAST EVALUATIONS OF
EARLY CHILDHOOD FAMILY EDUCATION PROGRAMS
ADMINISTERED BY THE COUNCIL ON QUALITY EDUCATION

Introduction

Evaluation of Early Childhood Family Education (ECFE) was a priority of the Council on Quality Education (CQE) since the first six pilot programs began in fiscal year 1975. A variety of evaluation and research specialists assisted the Council and its Advisory Task Force on ECFE in directing the focus of evaluation between fiscal years 1975 and 1984. These included: Daniel Stufflebeam of Western Michigan University; Virginia Shipman of Educational Testing Service; David Weikart and Dennis Deloria of Michigan's High/Scope Foundation; Paul Dokecki of Vanderbilt University; Donald Pierson of the Brookline Early Education Project; Duane Duffy of the U.S. General Accounting Office; Michael Patton, Richard Weinberg, and Shirley Moore of the University of Minnesota; and Irving Lazar of Cornell University.

Two major approaches to evaluation were discussed. Formative evaluation looks at issues related to program implementation, such as compliance with legislative intent, content and quality of services, numbers of participants, program costs, and participant satisfaction. Summative evaluation examines issues related to program outcomes, such as changes in children, parents and families as a result of ECFE participation. The general consensus of all involved was that formative evaluation was an immediate and ongoing priority to ensure that the programs were doing what they were intended to do. Of central importance for formative evaluation efforts was to see if the ECFE concept was workable in a variety of settings and if the programs could gain community acceptance and participation.

Since summative evaluation looks at the outcomes of program participation, by definition it applies only to established programs. Therefore, prior to fiscal year 1979, CQE focused almost exclusively on formative evaluation. Several evaluation strategies since that time have looked at short-term outcomes of program participation. However, the most effective approach to examining outcomes of ECFE is likely to be a longitudinal strategy that gathers information on first-time participants, as well as a matched group of non-participants, and then follows both of these groups of parents and children over a period of 10-20 years. Data on both groups would be compared periodically to determine if any differences may be due to participation in Early Childhood Family Education. Long-term evaluations, however, cost significantly more than either formative evaluation or summative evaluation of short-term outcomes. Although CQE applied to a variety of federal sources and requested additional state monies to finance such an effort, it was unable to secure sufficient funds.

In the following pages, conclusions from formative and summative (short-term outcomes only) evaluations conducted by CQE between 1974 and 1984 will be summarized by fiscal year.

Evaluation, Fiscal Year 1975

Six pilot programs were in their first year of operation during this fiscal year. Evaluation was directed at describing the implementation of ECFE in the six sites. The year-end report from the evaluator (Johnson, 1975) emphasized that the local programs had evolved during the year and provided a detailed description of each site. Recommendations to the Council included: diversity in ECFE services should be supported and encouraged; program costs should be analyzed; in-service training on outreach techniques to improve participation

should be provided to local staff; communication between local staff and elementary school personnel should be increased; the organization of parent education curriculum needed strengthening; and the objectives for children's participation needed clarification.

Evaluation, Fiscal Year 1976

Twelve programs were operating during the 1975-76 school year, seven new programs and five continuing. (The request for continuation funds from one of the original six sites was not approved.) The year-end evaluation report (Oberaigner, 1976) provided extensive descriptive information about each of the local programs which was compiled through a written questionnaire and the evaluation consultant's on-site visits. Results of a telephone survey of parents were also included in the report.

Conclusions and recommendations included the following:

1. The qualification and competence of local staff persons comprised the single most important strength of the programs. The report noted that staff had devoted substantial amounts of extra time and shown exceptional resourcefulness in meeting unanticipated needs and in making local changes.
2. The 12 programs had gathered momentum during the year and gained the community's acceptance.
3. Methods of collecting data and keeping records for the local programs needed to be improved.
4. Stated objectives of the local programs lacked sufficient specificity. It was also suggested that each program prepare a statement of its philosophy to clarify the framework of its activities and to promote more understanding of its purposes.
5. CQE should revise the process of applying for new and continuation grants to reduce the time consumed in writing the application and to shorten the time it takes for start-up of a program.
6. Since programs were operating mainly along the typical school calendar, the consultant recommended this be examined to ascertain if activities should be available at other times.
7. The report recommended examining the time local staff spend in contact with parents and children out of their total paid time.
8. Local sites should establish internal evaluation procedures to assure that they were responding to the needs of parents.

Results of the telephone survey of a sample of parents, conducted by the Minnesota Center for Social Research, were also reviewed in the consultant's report. Nearly all parents gave a very high rating to their respective program. It was found that, for many families, the initial attraction was a specific service (e.g., health screening) and the opportunity for their child to interact with other children. A substantial majority said they planned to continue participating. Finally, the responses showed that parents generally enjoyed learning more about parenting and felt their children benefited by the developmental experiences.

Evaluation, Fiscal Year 1977

Thirteen pilot programs were operating this year, as the Council had shifted one of its cost-effective/innovative grants programs to the ECFE category. The Minnesota Center for Social Research (MCSR), directed by Dr. Michael Patton, was contracted for a detailed study of program implementation. Teams of evaluators visited each of the 13 sites. On-site interviews were conducted with participants, advisory council members, program staff, and other school personnel. Additionally the teams observed operations in each location and repeated the telephone survey of parents. The final report prefaces its comments by describing ECFE programming as "exemplary" and states, "... in our experience with demonstration projects, it is unusual to find programs where implementation so closely follows intent, and where program implementation has been so thorough, so intense, and so successful." (Patton, 1977, p. 4)

Responses to interviews with staff and parents indicated that the major strengths of the parent education component of ECFE were: (1) a fundamental focus on improved parenting skills, better parent-child relationships, and integration of parents into the schools; (2) mutual support in parent groups; (3) reducing parental feelings of isolation; (4) gaining new information about child development; and (5) emphasis on the importance of parent input. Weaknesses were (1) the need to get more participation; (2) solving problems of transportation to the program sites; and (3) poor space and facilities. Early childhood education sessions were conducted concurrently with parent education services in most sites. Major strengths of this component were: (1) providing opportunities for the child to be with other children; (2) helping the child make the transition from an individual relationship with the parent to group situations; and (3) helping parents to improve their interaction with their child.

Parents and staff were questioned on their feelings about the priority of funding for ECFE programs relative to other educational programs. There was strong support for a high priority of funding for ECFE. Several distinct themes emerged in response to this issue (Patton, 1977, pp. 43-44):

1. The first five years are crucial. We must get to both parents and children during the critical formative years. Over half of all respondents specifically mentioned this argument.

A school board member: "Our children are our biggest asset. If we can properly take care of them--from the day they're born, it starts immediately, not just when they get to school--they'll remain our chief asset. It all stems back to the early years in the home."

2. The parent is the child's first and most important teacher. If you want to affect children you have to affect parents first. Over a third of the respondents mentioned this rationale.

"Schools can have little effect if the home environment isn't supportive."

"Parents hold the key to long-term effects in children."

3. Early Childhood Family Education is a prevention program. Other programs try to "compensate" or "rehabilitate"; this program is preventing

problems. A fourth of the respondents specifically used the word "prevention" in explaining their support for these programs. This argument is closely tied to the idea that the first five years are the crucial years developmentally. If problems don't develop then, schools won't have to spend large sums of money trying to deal with those problems.

4. Parenting doesn't come naturally; it's a skill that has to be learned--and that can be learned. A fourth of the respondents specifically mentioned this argument.

"Smaller families, generation gaps, highly mobile families--the information on parenting is no longer handed down from generation to generation. The skills have to be learned some other way."

5. The isolation of people and families in modern society makes it necessary to find new ways for people to support each other.

"Ours is a transient community. People don't know each other. Their own parents live far away or are deceased. They have no one to talk to about what is happening with their child. Grandmother isn't there as part of an extended family. In small families, children don't have sibling playmates. This program is saving both mother and children from almost complete social isolation--it's a life support system building a new sense of community among neighbors."

During fiscal year 1977, CQE systematized its collection of figures on participation and cost across the programs. These annual summaries document increases in participation at each site and decreases in per participant costs over the years between 1977 and 1984.

Evaluation, Fiscal Years 1978 and 1979

Nine new programs began operating in the fall of 1978, bringing the total of pilots for this biennium to 22. CQE and its Advisory Task Force developed an evaluation plan that would produce a series of related reports over these two years.

The Minnesota Center for Social Research (MCSR) was again retained to conduct telephone interviews of a sample of participating parents from each program. In its report (Patton, 1978), findings were generally consistent with those of previous years. The programs received an average rating of 3.7 on a scale of 0-4, with zero representing low or undesirable ratings. Nearly all the respondents, 95 percent, said that funding for Early Childhood Family Education should be viewed as either an "important" or "top" priority. Over 90 percent of the parents indicated that their participation in the program had helped "a great deal" or "somewhat." Responses centered on the opportunities for parents and children to meet other parents and children and on the value of the interaction. As with previous evaluations, parents commented on the high quality of local staff as an important strength of the programs. Most participants cited their desire for a source of stimulation for their children as the main reason they had become involved in this program. MCSR hypothesized that while most parents initially are looking for activities that will stimulate their children, their continued participation is based on the stimulation they receive in the activities designed for

adults. The most frequently mentioned weakness of the local programs was the need to expand services, either in the number of people that can be accommodated or with respect to the length of time services are offered.

Since prior evaluations had indicated successful implementation of the concept of Early Childhood Family Education, and responses of parents had been very positive, members of the Council and the Advisory Task Force felt that this was an appropriate point to assess the quality of the services provided at the local sites. Contractual arrangements were again made to have the Minnesota Center for Social Research coordinate the difficult task of defining quality criteria or standards of excellence for Early Childhood Family Education programs. In the spring of 1978, Dr. Michael Patton, director of the Center, began work with staff from each of the local program sites, as well as members of the Council, Task Force, and CQE staff. After extensive revision, a final list of criteria was adopted in the fall.

In October and November, 1978, teams from MCSR conducted on-site reviews at each of the 22 programs and made detailed use of the criteria through a five-point scale, with one being the highest rating. The report (Patton et al., 1978) showed that statewide, the criteria of highest quality were: (1) providing positive reinforcement to parents; (2) coordination with other community services; (3) providing parents with opportunities for personal growth and development; (4) program organization; (5) providing appropriate materials and activities for children; and (6) providing learning opportunities for parents in the centers.

The criteria with the lowest overall statewide ratings were: (1) reflection of parent and home environment in center-based children's activities; (2) parent participation in selecting children's materials and activities; (3) attractiveness of program environment; (4) advisory council decision-making role; and (5) parent involvement in program planning and implementation. The report noted that the overall mean for each of these relatively lower quality criteria was still well above the 3.0 level which represents basic quality implementation. Thus, these criteria were ranked low only in comparison to the other criteria. Overall, the data indicated that the 22 programs were attaining high levels of program quality.

The evaluation team identified several elements operating in the ECFE programs which it felt accounted for such high quality (Patton et al., 1978, pp. 39-42):

1. Quality of Staff: Staff exhibited commitment and enthusiasm, along with a demonstrated ability to operate their programs.
2. Clarity of Purpose: The programs were clearly directed at improving parenting and were not offering therapy, nursery school, day care, or social work support.
3. Staff Collegueship: There was staff consensus about program content and processes, and separate service components were integrated into a smoothly operating whole.
4. Sensitivity to Local Conditions: The programs combined sensitivity to local needs with leadership that provided a direction for improving local conditions.

5. Community Support: Local staff carefully integrated their program services with those of other community organizations.
6. Program Autonomy: While the Legislature and CQE provided basic guidelines for program operation, the day-to-day content and processes of the programs were determined by local people to meet the needs of families in local communities.

Two additional issues were addressed at length in the report. Parents who had been long-term participants were said to be a major untapped resource in most programs. It was suggested that these "experienced" parents take more active roles such as acting as home visitors to isolated or special needs families, leading selected parent groups in the center, and producing program newsletters. Program staff could then spend more time individualizing program services to better meet the diverse and complex needs of families in general, and particularly of parents from special groups with special needs. Secondly, the report suggested that staff in newer programs located in isolated rural areas be paired in a "buddy system" with staff of well-established programs to facilitate their professional development. In general, it was suggested that CQE arrange more opportunities for programs statewide to share their resources with each other.

In May of 1979, a mail survey of all 76 kindergarten teachers from the 49 schools served by the 22 Early Childhood Family Education programs was administered. The return rate was 62 percent, which is slightly above average for a mail survey of this kind. Seventy percent of the responding kindergarten teachers had taught at least three or more children who had previously been part of a CQE early childhood and family education program. Responses were reported only for teachers who knew they had taught at least one former program participant.

Compared to kindergarten children in general, these teachers believe that children from CQE Early Childhood Family Education programs have more positive attitudes toward school (90 percent agree); better all-around preparation for school (92 percent agree); better preparation in pre-kindergarten basic skills (87 percent agree); more confidence (92 percent agree); more social skills for interacting with other students (90 percent agree); better relationships with their parents (86 percent agree); fewer behavior problems (77 percent agree); and more emotional maturity (79 percent agree).

Teachers were also asked about their perceptions concerning the impact of the ECQE programs on parents. Compared to parents in general, kindergarten teachers believe that parents who have participated in Early Childhood Family Education programs are more active in their child's school (87 percent agree); more knowledgeable about child development (87 percent agree); more able to help their children with their school experience (87 percent agree); more confident as parents (87 percent agree); and more communicative with early elementary teachers (87 percent).

Finally, 96 percent of the teachers responding felt that funding for Early Childhood Family Education should be given either a high (70 percent) or medium level (26 percent) priority by the Minnesota Legislature. It is clear from these responses that kindergarten teachers believe that Early Childhood Family Education programs have positive and visible impact on participating parents and children. (Patton, 1979)

Evaluation, Fiscal Years 1980 and 1981

Again in 1979, the Minnesota Legislature increased the appropriation for Early Childhood Family Education and stated that up to 36 programs could be operated with these funds. New proposals were solicited, and the Council transmitted grants to 13 new programs in the fall of 1979. One of the third year programs was split into two separate programs, bringing the total of locations to 36.

During the spring and summer of 1979, Dr. Michael Patton worked with the directors of "established" local programs to develop a questionnaire designed for completion by parents upon beginning and again upon completing a phase of program participation. The questionnaire was field tested in 20 of the program locations and completed by over 2,240 parents during the fall of 1979.

Analysis of the results of this field test indicated that the parent self-assessment questionnaire basically failed as a pre-test to post-test instrument. Especially on the behavior, personal opinion, and knowledge items, there was little room for movement as a result of program participation. Respondents generally answered these items near the desired extreme of the continuum on the pre-test. Either parents enter the programs already exemplifying the qualities considered most desirable by the program directors, or program impact is in areas of nuance and increased confidence and certainty in desirable parental qualities. If the latter is the case, Dr. Patton speculates that possibly no standardized instrument will be able to pick up on these subtle nuances, and that a more qualitative research approach will be required to measure program impact. (Patton, 1979)

During the summer and fall of 1980, the firm of Anderson & Berdie Associates, Inc. was retained to look at short-term outcomes of Early Childhood Family Education programs in either their sixth or seventh year of operation. It was initially decided that one rural, one suburban, and one city program would be examined. During the early phase of the evaluation, however, it was determined that neither the Minneapolis nor St. Paul programs could be effectively evaluated within the specified design due to the geographic mobility of participant families. Therefore, an increased sample size was drawn from the rural (Staples Rural Family Development Program) and suburban (Bloomington Parent & Child: Growing Two-gether Program) sites selected for the study. The purpose of the evaluation was to determine whether or not these two programs had an impact upon their participants.

Three techniques were used to gather information for the study. First, parents who participated in the ECFE programs and parents who did not participate in these programs were surveyed by telephone. Second, teachers of kindergarten classes which contained a significant number of students who had formerly participated in ECFE were asked to rate all children in their classes on dimensions addressed by the programs. Third, independent observers rated these classes of children using the same dimensions as the teachers had used.

In reporting the results, the authors caution that generalizing the findings of this evaluation project to other ECFE programs located throughout the State may or may not be accurate, since the differences among the programs make such generalizations difficult. Additionally, the design limitations on the study did not allow for measures on the parents and children who participated in the Bloomington and Staples study prior to their participation. This presents two significant methodological problems. First, it cannot be assumed that the

parents who participated in the ECFE programs are a random sample of parents. Thus, differences observed between program participants and nonparticipants may or may not be attributable to the program. Second, without preliminary data on participants, measuring impact of the program on parental confidence or skill in the classic research sense is nearly impossible. Yet since this evaluation approach included three types of data collection - parental comparisons, child comparisons, and parent opinions, valid conclusions can still be drawn. These are summarized below. (Anderson & Berdie, 1980, pp. 19-21)

1. Parent participants and nonparticipants at Staples did not differ in many ways, while there were notable differences between participants and nonparticipants at Bloomington. One reason for this may be that nonparticipants in Staples rated higher in certain desirable parenting behaviors than did Bloomington nonparticipants. This might allow more evidence of program impact on parents to emerge in the Bloomington program.
2. There were no significant differences between teacher or independent observing ratings of participant and nonparticipant children in either the Bloomington or Staples programs. However, three factors may explain this lack of evident impact. First, teachers rated most of their students highly on all characteristics of the scale used, leaving little room for improvement in ratings regardless of ECFE program effects. Second, the impact of ECFE on children may not become obvious until several years after kindergarten. (Longitudinal studies of similar programs have found that evidence of program impact does not become evident until at least third grade.) Finally, it is possible that the rating scale used to compare students may not have been sensitive enough to pick up subtle differences that might exist between participant and nonparticipant children.
3. Both the Staples and Bloomington programs looked very favorable when assessed by directly asking participants about the impact of ECFE. All of the participants at both sites say that since their participation in the ECFE program in their area, they: (a) are better informed as a parent, (b) are more aware that other parents have many of the same problems, and (c) have a better understanding of the similarities and differences among children. Virtually all (more than 90 percent) of participants at both sites say that they now: (a) are more aware of different ways to raise children, (b) better understand their child's behavior, and (c) feel better about their skills as a parent. Based on parental responses, it appears that both ECFE programs are successful in preparing participants for the wide variety of situations they may encounter in their role as a parent.

The quality criteria for Early Childhood Family Education programs developed by Dr. Michael Patton and local program directors (discussed earlier) were revised in the fall of 1980. Drs. Karen Hess and John Bowers directed this evaluation effort. Their tasks were to assess the quality of 13 second-year ECFE programs and to identify potential areas for improvement in each of the programs.

The evaluators began with an intensive document review on the 13 programs, including the second-year proposal and negotiated grant budget for each. Evaluation instruments (including the Patton quality criteria) were then

revised and/or developed with extensive input from the program directors. After completion of this process, Drs. Hess and Bowers visited the programs separately, so that each program received an initial and a follow-up visit. In addition to the site visits, participating parents and advisory council members were surveyed on their reactions to and assessments of their local program.

As the final report (Hess & Bowers, 1980) describes, the 13 second-year programs were very diverse in geography, economics, and ethnicity. Five were in metropolitan areas and eight were in small towns or sparsely populated rural areas. Of the latter eight programs, three were operating on American Indian reservations. Although the types of service components provided are similar, the manner in which they were offered varies. The budgets and staffing of the programs also varied considerably.

Hess and Bowers summarized the central conclusion of their report as follows:

The main conclusion of this study can be simply stated: thirteen second-year ECFE programs funded by the Minnesota Council on Quality Education have been effectively implemented in diverse settings and have positively benefited parents and children in ways reflecting CQE's and their individual intended objectives. . . . Programs are characterized by clarity of mission, productive activity, creative direction, staff competency, and flexible adaptation to local needs of parents and their children. (Hess and Bowers, 1980, p. 31)

In reporting on the results of the parents' survey, Hess and Bowers describe the parent participants in the ECFE programs as unquestionably "true believers".

Parent ratings of program features were exceptionally high. Program staff and materials and activities provided for children were highest rated of various program features. Program opportunities provided parents -- to share problems, to make suggestions, to feel good as a parent, to discuss matters of importance to them, and to build on their strengths as parents -- received high ratings from parents. Parent activities and materials received slightly lower average ratings, but they were, nevertheless, high. (Hess and Bowers, 1980, p. 33)

Other recommendations included the following (Hess & Bowers, 1980, pp. 34-36):

1. The role of advisory councils may not be altogether satisfactory in some cases for these programs. Each program should have an ECFE advisory council that is formed for the program; existing advisory groups should not assume "add-on" ECFE responsibilities. That is the surest way to run a risk of having an ECFE program co-opted for other than intended purposes. In addition, advisory councils should include a good cross-section of the population served, and members should have their roles on the council clearly defined. An active, effective advisory council can do much to stretch the resources available to an ECFE program.
2. ECFE programs should be coordinated with the district and, if such exists, its community education division. In the sites visited, districts for these programs were not only highly supportive, but appeared to maintain a separation of ECFE and district objectives. Schools are and should be

represented in programs, but their influence must not overtip ECCE program objectives.

3. Continuing in-service is needed by some programs. Directors are appreciative of CQE support given to program staff development and regard its effects highly. In-service is costly; time for it must be efficiently used. Agendas devoted to specific program components would be of benefit to less experienced directors who want ideas. Program staff also request opportunities for more cross-program exchange.
4. The Council's ECCE program is an outstanding example of effective program development and support. Program concepts are clear; parent and child activities are developed in response to local needs. There is no doubt that these programs also have significant effects on parents and children. Effects are not currently measurable. They could be. And the public should be told of them when they are.
5. Second-year programs, certainly those represented here, are capable of carrying out self-evaluation, but procedures for doing so efficiently are needed. An excellent step taken by the Council was its development of criteria and indicators of the quality of program components. All program directors should be introduced to these quality criteria early and reminded of them often. Self-assessment procedures and progress measures related to ECCE criteria should be developed and reported from the inception of any program.

In the fall of 1980, an evaluation team began collecting information for case studies of a sample of families beginning participation in three program locations - Fairmont, Duluth, and Minneapolis. The evaluators were to look for potential changes resulting from involvement in the program over the course of one school year.

The following seven dimensions formed the focus of the study (List, Reiner, and La Freniere, 1981): parental self-concept; parental involvement in child care; family support systems; parental discipline and control; parental nurturance and responsiveness; parental awareness of complexity in child development; and parental guidance of child behavior. Multiple methods were developed to maximize the extent to which potential outcomes of program participation would be detected: 1) semi-structured interviews; 2) naturalistic observations in the home and center; 3) videotaping parent-child interaction while engaged in semi-naturalistic situations; and 4) questionnaires and assessment instruments.

Thirteen families initially were selected to participate in the evaluation project. An attempt was made to obtain as diverse a sample of families as possible. Ten families were visited in the fall and spring. The remaining three families were visited only in the fall; at various times, these families discontinued program participation. These families were contacted in the spring to determine their reasons for dropping out of the program. A detailed case study on each family is contained in the body of the report.

Perhaps the most striking finding from this evaluation was the diversity of outcomes potentially attributable to program participation. However, several consistent trends were identified across the families. From an examination of the case studies as a whole, the evaluators drew the following conclusions.

First, little change was observed on the following dimensions of family life: 1) parental nurturance and responsiveness; 2) parental involvement in child care; and 3) family support systems. In contrast, changes were consistently found in the following areas of family functioning that appeared attributable to program participation: 1) parental self-concept; 2) parental discipline and control; 3) parental awareness of complexity in child development; and 4) parental guidance of child behavior. In addition, parents often mentioned benefits of program involvement for their children.

Finally, the report stresses that it is necessary to qualify the findings of this evaluation. First, the project was exploratory in nature. The results should not be viewed as a definitive outcome evaluation of the ECFE program. Second, the voluntary nature of the sample selection procedure may limit the scope of the findings. Third, given time constraints in implementing this evaluation, some program-related changes may even have occurred prior to the initial fall visit. However, this report documents several discernible and potential outcomes in family life as a result of participation in ECFE programs.

Evaluation, Fiscal Years 1982 to 1984

Fiscal cutbacks, reductions in CQE staff, and legislative changes for the role of CQE with ECFE limited the scope of evaluation efforts during these years. Collection of annual participant/cost data continued, however. These show that in fiscal 1982, the 34 ECFE programs (two programs in Bloomington and in Minneapolis both merged into single programs, reducing the total of pilot sites from 36 to 34) served slightly less than 18,000 parents and children two or more times. Approximately 10,000 participants were involved ten or more times. Support for each program averaged \$41,000 in CQE grants, with another \$28,000 derived from other funding sources. Total support for the programs averaged \$69,000, but ranged substantially from \$30,000 to \$213,000.

Overall costs averaged \$130 per participant involved two or more times. Of this, 64 percent was paid with CQE grant funds. The remainder came from other sources, including vocational education, community education, special education, parent fees, and local district contributions. Average costs for participants involved ten or more times were \$234, reflecting the same proportions.

In the fall of 1982, Drs. Richard Weinberg and Judith Brady were contracted to produce a blueprint for future evaluation of ECFE programs coordinated by CQE. The report (Weinberg & Brady, 1983) points out that there has been a shift in the focus of evaluation of early childhood programs across the nation. Due to the value placed on pluralism and local initiative, evaluation is having to accommodate an increasing diversity in programming. Evaluators are less able to offer a single plan for program assessment, but must suggest a set of alternative strategies to document program implementation and impact.

The report states that there will always be a need for formative evaluation to insure that local ECFE programs are adequately meeting the needs of their communities. Summative evaluation could focus on the commonalities among local programs, such as certain skills which all programs agree are necessary for successful child-rearing. For example, the National Committee for Prevention of Child Abuse recommends that all parents learn to develop networks of social support and to locate and make use of appropriate

information as their children develop.

Four recommendations were presented for future evaluation activities (Weinberg & Brady, 1983):

1. Create a data collection system and bank on program participants.
2. Establish an in-service program for ECCE program directors to share perspectives on evaluation and useful strategies.
3. Establish the role of ECCE evaluation/research coordinator to provide liaison among CQE programs, central staff, and college and university training programs and to facilitate a network of ongoing student and faculty-initiated evaluation activities within the programs.
4. Maintain and update a list of ECCE-related questions or topics which might be studied in particular programs or clusters of programs.

Summary

The preceding pages have summarized the conclusions from Council on Quality Education evaluations of pilot Early Childhood Family Education programs since their inception in 1974. Evaluation tasks have been performed by individual consultants, outside agencies, CQE staff, and local program personnel.

Over time, the findings have reflected a steady growth in the quality of program services and administration. However, a variety of areas that needed improvement were also identified, proving most useful to CQE in program coordination statewide. The most consistent evaluation findings document the competence and commitment of staff in the local programs and the favorable attitudes of participating parents. There has also been substantial agreement among evaluators about the strength of the program and its concept.

A recently published book, entitled Strengthening Families, describes parent education and child care as strategies critical to maximizing human development in this country. In a chapter entitled "Exemplary State Programs," Minnesota's Early Childhood Family Education program is described at length as a model of parent education for the nation. The authors acknowledge that it will be a challenge to show with hard data that ECCE programs work and are cost-effective.

Many evaluation experts, however, would argue that the Council has already generated the evidence most relevant to policy decisions: The overall program is operating according to budget and specifications, and staff, parents, and relevant community members rate it highly. Measurable behavioral outcomes for parents and children will be difficult to demonstrate in the short run, given the state of the art of measurement and program evaluation. Moreover, ECCE was designed to provide readily accessible resources to all families within a program community; it is not intended to be an intensive long-term intervention for a few problem families. Even in the latter instance, the demand for measurable effects would push the limits of program evaluation technology. Given the broad goals of the program, evidence of accessibility, use, and parents' satisfaction perhaps is all that is possible and all that should be required. That evidence is available, and it is uniformly positive. (Hobbs et al., 1984, p. 267)

CHARACTERISTICS OF SUCCESSFUL PROGRAMS
AN INSTRUMENT TO ASSIST DISTRICTS IN SELF EVALUATION OF PROGRAMS

Building upon the results of earlier evaluations described in Part I, and considering changes in Early Childhood Family Education legislation in and since 1984, the following instrument has been developed to assist local programs in the evaluation of their programs. It is also used by state staff and will become a part of the Minnesota Community Education Association's program review process. The program component criteria listed reflect the characteristics of successful programs and indicate compliance with current Minnesota Statutes and proposed Board of Education Program Rules.

Evaluation is an on-going inservice topic for program coordinators/directors. At a forthcoming meeting of all program coordinators, this evaluation instrument and plans for long-term program evaluation, with the accompanying data collection needs, will be the major focus. Dr. Irving Lazar of Cornell University, who has assisted in the development of a long-term evaluation plan described later in this report, will be present to clarify and respond to questions on evaluation strategies for the Early Childhood Family Education program both locally and statewide. Local program staff and advisory councils will be requested to evaluate their own program with the following instrument prior to this meeting.

EARLY CHILDHOOD FAMILY EDUCATION
PROGRAM EVALUATION

Program Component Criteria	Rate each item 1-5 as indicated	5 Exc.	4 Good	3 Avg.	2 Fair	1 Poor
I. COMMUNITY OUTREACH AND INPUT						
A. Extensive personal outreach is made to parents with young children from birth to kindergarten enrollment.						
B. The program is planned to meet the specific needs of the area served.						
C. The Advisory Council plays an active decision-making role in program planning, development and monitoring.						
D. The Advisory Council membership includes a variety of community and parent representatives.						
E. Parents are actively involved in program planning, development and monitoring.						
F. The program adequately represents all socio-economic groups in the community.						
G. Arrangements are made to facilitate parent participation (flexible hours, transportation, convenient sites).						
H. A variety of activities is offered to accommodate different needs and learning styles.						
I. The early childhood family education program coordinates with other community services and resources.						
J. The program appropriately supplements, but does not supplant, the functions or mandates of other programs.						
K. The program is considered an integral part of the school district and has its support.						
COMMENTS:						

Program Component Criteria	Rate each item 1-5 as indicated	5 Exc.	4 Good	3 Avg.	2 Fair	1 Poor
II. PARENT EDUCATION						
A. The principles of child development and parent education are taught by using parents' own concrete experiences.						
B. Parents are positively reinforced to affirm and enhance their positive feelings about themselves and their parent role.						
C. The parent educator possesses the knowledge and ability to infuse new information and facilitate parents' learning and growing through group processes.						
D. The program nurtures and enhances the healthy functioning of the variety of family systems represented by emphasizing and providing opportunities for personal growth and on-going adult development.						
E. Educational materials on early childhood and parent education available as resources are reviewed for sexual, racial and cultural bias.						
F. Parents who participate in center-based programs have opportunities to learn and grow through group discussions.						
G. Home visits are carefully planned to meet specific parent/child needs.						
COMMENTS:						

EARLY CHILDHOOD FAMILY EDUCATION PROGRAM EVALUATION

Program Component Criteria	Rate each item 1-5 as indicated	5 Exc.	4 Good	3 Avg.	2 Fair	1 Poor
III. CHILD-CENTERED ACTIVITIES						
A. Child development activities and experiences are designed and directed to promote child development and build interest.						
B. Learning materials and activities for children are appropriate to the child's developmental level, needs and interests.						
C. Parents and children have choices in selecting materials and activities in which they will participate.						
D. Parents are involved in actual child development activities as prime educators of their children.						
E. Parents are provided information on the purposes of their children's activities.						
F. Center-based child development activities reflect the importance of the parent and the home environment.						
G. The center environment is safe, interesting and stimulating to children.						
COMMENTS:						

EARLY CHILDHOOD FAMILY EDUCATION
PROGRAM EVALUATION

Program Component Criteria	Rate each item 1-5 as indicated	5 Exc.	4 Good	3 Avg.	2 Fair	1 Poor
IV. PROGRAM OPERATIONS						
A. The program environment is attractive, inviting, and personal for parents and children.						
B. Professional staff members are competent family educators and are appropriately licensed.						
C. Professional staff are paid a professional wage and provided staff development opportunities.						
D. Staff work together well, form a congruent and integrated professional group.						
E. The program is well organized.						
F. The program has clearly defined, relevant objectives.						
G. The program's clear purpose is education, not therapy, nursery school or day care.						
H. The staff conducts evaluations of the program.						
I. Records are maintained to document program participation and program activities.						
J. Fees, if charged, are reasonable and easily waived for families unable to pay.						
K. A program budget which accounts for all Early Childhood Family Education aid, levy and other funds is on file with the program coordinator and the district administrator.						
COMMENTS:						

EARLY CHILDHOOD FAMILY EDUCATION
PROGRAM EVALUATION

V. Component Summary	Total $\div$ by N = Mean Score Rating
A. Community Outreach and Input	$\div$ by 11 =
B. Parent Education	$\div$ by 8 =
C. Child-Centered Activities	$\div$ by 7 =
D. Program Operations	$\div$ by 11 =

Criteria developed by M. Patton et al., 1978
Revised by K. Hess and J. Bowers, 1980
Revised by L. Engstrom, 1985

PROGRAM GROWTH ACCOMPLISHMENTS AND CONCERNS

In response to the legislation of 1984 which established a state aid/local levy formula for funding Early Childhood Family Education, 253 school districts levied in the fall of 1984 for a program to be implemented in the 1985-86 school year.

The 253 districts involved collectively levied 61% of their levy limit. As of December 1985, 93% of these districts had a program in operation. The remaining 7% reported that they were still in the planning stages; had experienced a change in district administration that affected progress; could not find qualified staff or were concentrating on building a base of support for the program. Seventy-two percent of programs statewide were within their first two years of program implementation. The other 28% either had established a program earlier with Council on Quality Education (COE) grant funding or through Community Education with minimal funding from a variety of sources.

The number of districts currently involved in Early Childhood Family Education represents substantial growth of approximately 800% over the 34 COE sites located in 29 districts in 1982-83. During this expansion stage, experienced programs have been invaluable in providing assistance to new programs. Conversely, new programs have been learning new techniques, especially in the areas of outreach and coordination with other community resources, that are beneficial to experienced programs.

Sharing this working knowledge has been a major thrust of the Department of Education. In January of 1984, a 268 page Guide for Developing Early Childhood Family Education Programs was disseminated to all school districts. The guide is a compilation of ideas and information gathered from all existing programs at that time in response to the question, "What do you know now that you wish you had known when your program was just beginning?" A second major effort was the establishment of a statewide regional inservice network to provide a minimum of three days of concentrated inservice education per year for Early Childhood Family Education staff, administrators and advisory council members. Two "volunteers" from each of the eleven regions participate in a train-the-trainer session facilitated by state staff; they then facilitate a similar session in their own region using materials and resources provided or arranged for at the training session. This system provides for easily accessible inservice sessions where new information can be disseminated and discussed throughout the state within a 30 day period; participants have an opportunity to share information and concerns; travel time and costs are minimized; the leadership base for Early Childhood Family Education is greatly enhanced and an invaluable networking capability is being created. More than 400 persons have participated in each of the three series of regional sessions conducted within the past year. When districts were asked to indicate which kinds of department assistance or resources they had used, the regional inservice sessions and the Guide were each listed by 84% of the respondents. Other forms of assistance most frequently indicated were:

Current licensure information - 86%

Questions and Answers on Early Childhood Family Education - 71%

General update mailings - 73%

Newsletter entitled Partners in Learning - 69%

(A joint venture of Early Childhood Family Education and Vocational Consumer and Family Education)

Early Childhood Family Education workshops at major conferences - 65%
Someone who could respond to specific questions or concerns was listed as the most critical and most appreciated resource.

Administration by the Department of Education has also included the following efforts to assist districts in developing quality programs:

- 1) Development of proposed program rules, currently under consideration by the State Board of Education.
- 2) Study of appropriate teacher licenses and subsequent development of two new licenses - Parent Educator and Early Childhood Family Educator - now being studied by the Board of Teaching.
- 3) Description of health, safety and educational standards for the children's learning environment.
- 4) Compilation and dissemination of models for coordinating Early Childhood Family Education and Early Childhood Special Education.
- 5) Enhanced coordination with vocational education, early childhood screening, public health nurses, public libraries, child care providers, Minnesota Early Learning Design, MN Council on Children, Youth, and Families and others. Local coordination efforts likewise have been greatly increased with program administration through Community Education.
- 6) Extensive collaboration with representatives of colleges, universities and vocational adult extension engaged in teacher preparation and/or inservice education.
- 7) Development of a one credit course or workshop entitled "Introduction to Early Childhood Family Education" - to be required of all instructional and administrative staff. Forty-five higher education representatives have already been trained to teach the course throughout the state. Additional training sessions will be provided in the future. A complete training manual has been developed in conjunction with higher education to help assure a degree of consistency throughout the state.

The following is a summary of information derived from a survey of the 253 levying districts, based upon program activity during the period of July 1 to December 30, 1985. For most districts, this represents less than one-half of their program year.

EXTENT OF PARTICIPATION

	<u>Parents</u>	<u>Children</u>	<u>Siblings</u>
Parent Child Classes (6-12 sessions)	23,269	23,302	5,650
Special Events (one-time activity)	57,852	39,586	14,489
Home Visits	916	985	347

240,400 different families received newsletters from their local program.
2,760 parents served as members of an advisory council or task force.

If the current rate of participation continues throughout the remainder of the year, the program statewide will either meet or exceed projected figures included in the biennial budget of 1985.

An on-going concern is that of reaching families who are not likely to walk in and register in response to the usual public relations or marketing efforts. Great strides are being made by a growing number of local programs, but statewide, minority and disadvantaged families are still seriously under-represented in the program. One regional inservice network series focused upon outreach techniques and coordination with other community resources to better meet the needs of these families. The sharing of both successful and unsuccessful experiences was extremely useful and encouraging. Although the effort expended is not quickly reflected by participation numbers, program staff recognize that while all families benefit from such a program, disadvantaged families usually make the greatest gains, and therefore, reaching them is a high priority. The Minnesota Legislature which established a funding formula based upon the number of very young children in the school district, rather than upon enrolled participants, is to be commended for its foresight in this area.

ADVISORY COUNCILS

In addition to the required majority of participating parents, which included employed and non-employed, single, step, and foster parents, representatives on the Early Childhood Family Education Advisory Council most frequently mentioned include:

Child Care Providers	Vocational Education
Human Services	Law Enforcement
Clergy	School Board Members
Head Start	School Counselors and
Elementary Principals	Psychologists
Kindergarten Teachers	Agriculture Extension
Health Professionals	Senior Citizens
Public Librarians	Local Businesses
Nursery School Directors	Community Education
Special Education	Directors
Private School Administrators	WIC Program
Home Economics Teachers	

The functions of the councils, indicated in order of frequency, are to:

- 1) Serve as eyes and ears for the program in the community;
- 2) Assist with outreach;
- 3) Monitor the program;
- 4) Conduct public relations efforts;
- 5) Plan the program*, and
- 6) Help coordinate program services with other community resources.

*Initial planning and designing of the program was often accomplished by an Early Childhood Family Education Task Force which preceded the Early Childhood Family Education Advisory Council. In most cases, at least some of the advisory council members had been part of the task force.

INTERDISTRICT COOPERATION

Forty-one percent of all districts indicated involvement in a cooperative arrangement with neighboring school districts for Early Childhood Family Education.

Several consortia or cooperatives of 6-8 school districts share coordination functions as well as staff and resources. A larger number of districts share a coordinator or other staff with one or two neighboring districts. Some districts purchase program services from an adjacent district for their families in lieu of establishing their own program.

FACILITIES/SPACE

Sixty-nine percent of districts responding indicated that:

- 1) Adequate, appropriate space was made available by the district, or
- 2) Available space could be modified at moderate expense to accommodate the Early Childhood Family Education program.

Others are borrowing or renting space in the community.

SCHEDULING OF ACTIVITIES

Programs report that they are offering activities during weekday mornings, early afternoons, late afternoons, over the dinner or supper hour, early evenings, Saturday mornings and Sunday afternoons to accommodate the schedules of families in their communities. This flexibility of scheduling, along with the heavy emphasis on outreach, most likely accounts for the increased participation of fathers, single parents, employed parents, teen parents and others who have generally not been well represented in the past.

Similar data will be collected each year to provide for local and state comparisons with this information.

A PLAN FOR THE COLLECTION OF INFORMATION
NEEDED FOR MONITORING AND EVALUATION OF PROGRAMS

The basic data collected on each child and family is planned to serve several purposes:

To identify the families and children both for the keeping of attendance records and to permit later follow-up;

To provide the program staff with emergency information if it is needed;

To provide a description of the composition of the family both for current reporting purposes and for the construction of samples for later study;

To provide some very basic family history: its mobility, its changes over time, and any special characteristics of the family or its members;

To get information on any special history of the child that might have long-term effects, e.g., special medical conditions, trauma, sensitivities, etc.;

The family's past experience with ECFE programs, and the source of their referral to the program;

A description of the specific program in which they are participating, its meeting times, duration, size and leadership, so that selective evaluations can be made of such things as weekday programs, different program types, etc.

These seven kinds of information should be gathered within the first month of a program sequence, with the basic identifying information gathered immediately upon entrance. This latter point is important because it could be necessary, in the future, to compare people who dropped out with people who stayed with the program.

Additionally, it will be important to ask parents, early in their initial sessions, to sign a release to permit future follow-up through school and other public records. In most studies of this kind, parents who are given explanations regarding the need for follow-up studies show little resistance to signing such a release. It is important, however, that staff are adequately prepared to do this.

The following is a proposed enrollment form to be used statewide. It would be contained on a single page two-part carbonless form. One copy would remain in the district; the other would be submitted to the state office or other central place to assure that the information is retained and is accessible a decade or more from now.

EARLY CHILDHOOD FAMILY EDUCATION PROGRAM ENROLLMENT FORM

DISTRICT NO _____ RECORD NO _____

TODAY'S DATE _____

CHILD'S NAME _____

CHILD'S BIRTHDATE _____

NAME OF CARETAKER _____

HOME ADDRESS _____

HOUSE _____ APARTMENT _____ OWN _____ RENT _____

HOME TELEPHONE _____ OTHER PHONE _____

FAMILY PHYSICIAN _____ PHONE _____

SPECIAL HEALTH INFO. _____

PRIOR ENROLLMENTS IN ECFE _____

HOW DID YOU HEAR ABOUT THIS PROGRAM? _____

SESSIONS YOU WILL ATTEND: MORNING _____ AFTERNOON _____ EVENING _____
WEEKDAYS _____ WEEKENDS _____

ANY SPECIAL CHARACTERISTICS OR UNUSUAL HISTORY OF THIS CHILD _____

OTHER PERSONS LIVING WITH THIS CHILD

ADULTS _____ M _____ F _____ RELATIONSHIP: _____

OCCUPATION _____ (room for four adults on form)

CHILDREN _____ AGE _____ M _____ F _____ RELATIONSHIP _____
(room for four children on form)

IN HOW MANY DIFFERENT PLACES HAS THIS CHILD LIVED FOR MORE THAN SIX MONTHS?

CHILD'S SOCIAL SECURITY NO. _____

FOR OFFICE USE ONLY

REASONS FOR ENROLLING: _____

ATTENDANCE SUMMARY

REASON FOR ENROLLING

Parents will also be asked to complete this form at the time of enrollment. Numbers of responses (1-9) will be recorded on enrollment form by staff.

Parents attend Early Childhood Family Education Programs for many different reasons. To help us make these sessions more useful to you, please check the three most important reasons you have for enrolling in this program. If any of your reasons are not on this list, write them in on line 9.

- ☐ 1) To learn more about child development
- ☐ 2) To take advantage of the health screening service
- ☐ 3) To meet and discuss common concerns with other parents
- ☐ 4) To get started on a relationship with the public schools
- ☐ 5) To learn how to effectively interact with my child
- ☐ 6) To prevent later problems with my child
- ☐ 7) To get expert help in child rearing
- ☐ 8) To be able to borrow the right kinds of toys
- ☐ 9) _____

A PLAN FOR THE LONG-TERM EVALUATION OF THE QUALITY AND COST-EFFECTIVENESS OF EARLY CHILDHOOD FAMILY EDUCATION

The task of designing and carrying out a long-term evaluation of the quality and cost-effectiveness of this program involves five distinct initial tasks:

- 1) Developing a standard instrument for the collection of background data on the participating families;
- 2) Developing a standard procedure for determining the real costs of the program;
- 3) Identifying feasible measures of program quality which all the users of these evaluations will find useful;
- 4) Selecting an appropriate instrument to monitor parental acceptance of the program;
- 5) Selecting and developing valid and useful indicators of program outcomes.

Work on the first of these tasks is already underway, and a preliminary instrument will be field-tested this spring. It will serve as a standard enrollment form; it will incorporate the information needed for reports and for the staff's direct work with the family; and it will serve as the baseline from which to construct samples for later evaluation tasks. It will also contain the information necessary for the conduct of long-range follow-up on the children as they move through the public schools. Design of the forms will take advantage of modern data processing techniques to assure that the amount of "paperwork" required to deal with this information will be kept to a minimum, while enabling rapid analyses of the data and ease of information retrieval.

Determining the costs of the program will require agreement among the participating school districts on the definition and allocation of costs, on the translation of services and overhead into costs, and on the definitions of program components. In order to carry out valid cost-effectiveness studies, it will be necessary to collect much finer-grained fiscal information than is required for standard audit procedures. Furthermore, it will be necessary to allocate such costs as space and utilities which are not usually assigned to specific programs within a school building.

While the data necessary for such measures of cost-effectiveness are probably in the files of individual districts, it will be necessary to bring their business managers together and reach agreement with them on a standard system of reporting costs that will not overburden them or duplicate cost-control or local reporting procedures they already have, and to obtain their acceptance of and collaboration in this task. A major reason there are so few measures of the cost-effectiveness of public service programs has been the difficulty of arriving at common procedures and data collection across a large number of independent organizations. Because the validity of these data is so important, simply "requiring" the data will not assure its quality. Furthermore, district business managers are the best source of consultation to the state as to the most reliable and valid measures to use in determining program costs. Preliminary examination of fiscal data recording and reporting practices will begin this spring, and will be used to identify the areas which require

agreements, definitions, and uniform procedures. State UFARS and Data Acquisition staff will be consulted in constructing a uniform cost-collection system.

The third task, developing a set of useful indicators of program quality, has already been approached in earlier evaluations conducted under the auspices of the Minnesota Council on Quality Education. These criteria were principally defined from the perspective of staff and parents, and were determined by the judgments of participants and/or observers. These earlier efforts are being reviewed with two additional questions in mind:

1) Are these indicators of quality appropriate for audiences other than the direct participants in the program? Will we need to develop additional or different indicators to meet the concerns of the general public or the Legislature?

2) Can we find indicators of quality that do not depend upon the judgments of participants or intermittent observers? For example, are there behavioral changes in program participants that can be objectively measured? Are there short-term outcomes that differentiate program qualities? Are there some basic standards of quality that can be defined within the program's operations? Can we construct feedback mechanisms that serve both self-evaluation and an objective indicator of quality?

Because Minnesota is one of the first states to be asking these questions of educational programs, there are only limited resources based upon experience available. It will be necessary to construct and validate many of our own instruments and procedures.

The selection of an appropriate instrument for monitoring parental acceptance of the program throughout the state will be accomplished soon. During previous evaluations, a number of such instruments were developed. These will be examined with a view toward selecting the one which best combines simplicity of use with reliability of measurement. Because parental acceptance is crucial to this program, it will also be necessary to devise a means of soliciting parental suggestions for program improvement, and to develop procedures to assure continuing program responsiveness to parental concerns, which will most likely change over time. The plan is to continue to involve parents as direct participants in the selection of the contents of the evaluation procedures themselves, because they are, in many ways, the most relevant judges of the program and its principal audience.

The selection of feasible and useful indicators of long-term program outcomes will be a complex task. It is not reasonable to assume that this program is the most important influence in a child's life, and separating its effects from all the other influences in the lives of families and children requires care in both the analytic procedures and in the selection of outcomes to be studied. The outcomes to be studied must meet a variety of criteria.

They must be objectively and reliably measureable. An outcome indicator which requires a teacher's judgment, or is subject to the vagaries of the moment, is not credible or useful.

They must be feasible of measurement over large populations. A measure which is too expensive of time or equipment is not useful for this purpose. For example, individual diagnostic studies of children may be both reliable and objective,

but are not feasible for evaluating a statewide program. While small samples may be studied intensively for specific evaluative purposes, such procedures cannot meet the state's major needs in assessing the worth of this investment.

They must sensibly reflect the purposes of the program. It does not serve the state's needs to have measures of outcomes that are not relevant to the central purposes of the program, regardless of how objective or feasible they are. An example of mis-selection of an outcome measure was the attempt to evaluate Head Start by the use of IQ measures. Since Head Start was never intended to affect IQ, the use of such a measure, regardless of the outcome, was not only irrelevant to the program's purpose, but, by drawing attention away from the principal purpose, had mischievous effects on the program. Too often an instrument is selected for evaluation because it exists rather than because it is a valid measure of the program itself. In the case of this program, there is unusual clarity and consensus about the purposes of the program. This clarity will help in selecting outcome measures which all of the audiences concerned with the program can agree will be sensible indicators of program success. Such indicators should be behavioral, and not simply scores on tests.

Similarly, the measures selected should make sense within the Minnesota public school environment. Labelled as ecological validity, this principle requires that a measure or criterion be appropriate to the setting in which it is used.

The program outcome measures must be useful. The effort involved in longitudinal research is such that it should not be sufficient to be able to report that a program was or was not effective in meeting the stated goals. It should also provide information which will enable program improvement, which will indicate areas of relative strength, identify characteristics of families or persons most likely to benefit from the program, and indicate the ways in which this program relates to other programs and experiences. The evaluative detail should also correspond to the detail with which program costs are recorded, so that the relative cost, as well as the relative effectiveness of separate components of the program, can be evaluated along with the overall costs and effects.

It is important for the Legislature to recognize that the long-term effects of this program are likely to be the most important effects, and that the phrase "long-term" means exactly that. One cannot expect long-term findings until the children in the first round of programs have graduated from secondary school. Thus we will be collecting information for use fifteen and more years from now, and need to set up data collection systems which will enable us to retrieve information covering the whole public school career of these children, as well as be able to find them and their parents two decades from now.

While work will begin on the first four of these five tasks within the year, the planning and development for the fifth task will take longer. However, since we will not need to collect those measures for some time to come, and will have basic information on each family from the time of enrollment, we can afford the time to meet the challenges of the fifth task sensibly and carefully. We expect to get assistance in that task from parents and staff, from school personnel, from experts at Minnesota colleges and universities, and from consultants and the research literature.

We will be concerned with answering the following kinds of long-term questions:

- Who benefits, and how, from this program?
- What are the relative costs and outcomes of various program components?
- Does participation in this program affect the stability of family life?
- Are the children of participants less likely to present behavioral difficulties in the classroom or elsewhere?
- Are parent participants more likely to remain active in school affairs throughout their children's school careers?
- Are the children of participants more likely to finish secondary school?

This list of questions is not meant to be exhaustive; it is illustrative of the kinds of outcomes considered sensible to seek, useful to learn, and feasible of measurement.

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